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AUTHOR Chesney, Mailisha
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ABSTRACT

An examination of the literature on how parents reading with their children affects children's interest and ability in reading was informative. Especially useful were 3 articles--those of Scarbrorough, Dorbrich, and Hager (1991); Ridout (1992); and Martin (1993). The first article states that not all children follow in their parents' desire for them to love reading. Even though parents may read aloud to their children, some children are uninterested. Children who become poor readers typically amuse themselves with books, on their own, about 2-3 times a week, while children who become normal readers typically read daily. The Ridout article attests that when parents read very little to children and infrequently listen to them read aloud, the children will become poor readers. The focus in the article by Martin is on the benefits of reading aloud to one another for both adults and children. Children will learn how to read well only if they are read to from the time that they are young. (Contains 7 references.) (CR)

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Parents Reading With Their Children: Effects on Reading Ability

by

Mailisha Chesney

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Dominican College of San Rafael
School of Education

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This paper is a brief review of the literature on how parent reading with their children affect children's interest and ability in reading. As an avid reader myself, I've often wondered whether my reading style derived from the amount of reading my parents did with me as a young child or whether it had solely to do with my own personal character. The many questions of environment vs. genetics have always fascinated me, as it is clear that we are all both a product of our environment as well as a product of our genetic make-up. With regards to a child's reading interest and ability I've always been curious to know whether the causes of such behaviors were the direct result of the interest and ability of parents, or whether it had more to do with predetermined character traits of the child.

When I began researching and reading articles for this paper, I felt sure that a child's reading ability and interest had to be directly related to that of the parents. The articles established that reading aloud to children, beginning when they are very young, has invaluable effects on their future reading interests and abilities. However, I also learned that there are times when, despite a parent's good reading habits, the child will *not* share their parent's interest. This really surprised me. Even though I realize that every child is an individual, and I fully expect them to have different interests than their parents, I still somehow expected them to share in parents' love of reading. To me reading is more than merely something I've always done for pleasure, but also an important skill, a tool if you will, for success in life.

Aside from reading articles, I informally interviewed a librarian at the Sonoma State University library and she told me that despite her absolute passion for reading, all three of her children (2 boys and 1 girl) dislike reading themselves. While she frequently read to her children from the time they were very young, that still didn't serve to arouse their interest in books. As teen-agers, her children are competent readers, but they never read for their own pleasure. However, an important point here is that while her children may not enjoy reading they do have the ability to read well, which is most likely a result of having a parent reading to them as young children. When I was a teen-ager I loved to read. Even though, at that time, I developed a loathing

for school, it never occurred to me to shun reading too, for that was always my favorite "escape." Unfortunately, it seems that once a person develops an attitude towards reading, whether positive or negative, it doesn't really seem to change much later in life, unless they are the kind of person who is open to change.

Three articles that were informative; Scarbrorough, Dorbrich, & Hager (1991), Ridout (1992), and Martin (1993). In Scarborough, Dorbrich & Hager's work I learned that not all children follow in their parents' desire to love reading. In discussing the amount of reading aloud that the parents did with their children, they found that it seemed to be the disinterest of *the children* for this activity which determined how often they were read to, rather than the desire of the parents to spend time reading with their children. I had always assumed that everyone loved being read aloud to, even people who don't particularly enjoy reading by themselves. They found that the children who became poorer readers typically amused themselves with books on their own only two or three times a week, while the children who became normal readers typically did so almost daily. The researchers of this study concluded that the disinterest of many of the poorer reading children was more self-imposed than parent-related.

In this article, the study was divided into many different sections. In one, they focused on just the relevance of the fathers reading aloud to their children. They found that the children who were poorer readers were read to less by their fathers than the children who became better readers. The results of this part of the study were not so much a surprise as was the fact that they studied it at all. The authors did not explain why this was done, so I assumed that it had to do with the different perceptions that children have of their mothers and fathers. Also, maybe it was assumed that most of the reading that was going on in the home, and being carefully examined in the other sections of their study, was being done solely by the mothers.

Ridout's article (1992) confirmed my beliefs once again. Her study attested to the fact that when a parent reads very little to their children and infrequently listens to their children read aloud to them, their children will become poor readers themselves.

The focus of the article by Martin (1993) was solely on the benefits of reading aloud to one another. The author discussed the value and importance of this activity; improving your reading skills and vocabulary, as well as enhancing interest in literature and story-telling. This seemed like a powerful activity, moving beyond the issue of merely getting young children "hooked" on reading. It showed how people who already have a sense of what reading is all about can discover new worlds through the adventures of reading aloud. Martin's work illustrated how valuable it is for adults, as well as with children, to read aloud to one another.

In conclusion I want to say that the beliefs which I already held about the effects of parent's reading with children were confirmed. I wondered how much a child's interest and ability in reading was formed by the amount of reading their parents did with them as young children, and I found that while there is certainly a time when a child's personal character will assert itself and either love reading or dislike it, children will learn *how* to read well only if they are read to from the time that they are young. It is a rare situation when a child who is not exposed to books and reading becomes a good reader when they are in school. This child will most likely struggle throughout most, or all, of her school years trying to catch up with the abilities of the other children, because the child has missed out on the process of being exposed to words and stories. While that same child may eventually "catch up" later on in life and even grow to love the world of books one day, it is highly unlikely due to the reading styles of her parents. I don't see how a child who has not had these experiences could ever know, or become interested in, a reality that they were never exposed to.

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